

From Global Mission

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The major job of the Air Force at the end of June, 1945, was to get our heavy bomb groups into the Pacific area from the European Theater as rapidly as bases were available. It was the lack of bases that provided the bottleneck in that movement. The small islands which we captured soon became overcrowded with Army, Navy, and Air installations, and it was necessary to find additional sites. Many of the delays in doing this I believed would be eliminated after the discussions I had had with Admiral Nimitz and with General MacArthur. However, even under the best of conditions it would be several months before we would get landing fields in Okinawa capable of taking care of the hundreds of B-17's and the B-24's we could throw in there from Europe. In the meantime, we were building up our B-29's at a rapid rate, sending them over Japan with ever-increasing loads of explosives. It was certain, as General LeMay had said, that the interior of Japan would be a shambles by the 1st of October.

I could not see how Japan could stay in the war very long after the defeat of Germany, and the imminence of this final victory raised other questions, such as the future security of the United States; the creation of an organization that would prevent future wars; the future organization of the Army Air Force and its place in the world-wide air picture after the war. In general, these were matters for staff work; things to be studied carefully from all angles and tied in with our foreign policy, if we had any, so that when they were presented to higher authority—to the Combined Chiefs of Staff and our representatives at the United Nations' meetings—there would be no hit and miss conclusions.

I have always regretted two things about the war. One was not being able to accept an invitation from Goering to visit Germany before the war started. The other was not to have had a chance to talk with Goering

after the war was over and he was a prisoner, and to ask him a few questions. The first I could not do, because of the disapproval of the War Department. The second was not possible because during my tour of Europe Goering had not yet been captured and later I was too busy to make a special trip to see him. I wanted particularly to ask him questions concerning things the German Air Force might have done, but did not do. Why did the German Air Force not continue the Battle of Britain when the R.A.F. was so badly battered? What made Goering overlook the obvious strategic power available in the development of his Air Force when he had such a wonderful start? Was it because Hitler dictated to Goering the policies for developing the German Air Force? Was it because the generals in the ground army had such influence over Hitler? Or was it because Goering himself just wasn't on the ball?

However, General Spaatz saw him. About the middle of May, I had received a letter from Tooev in which he outlined the interview he had had with Goering on May 10, 1945, three days after his capture. In that interview I found the answers to some of the questions in which I was interested; but whether they were offered truthfully or whether they simply represented Goering's effort to clear himself I could not determine.

For instance, Goering said that in 1940 Hitler began to interfere with Air Force operations by taking air fleets away from his (Goering's) planned operations. That, according to Goering, spelled the breakdown of the efficiency of the Luftwaffe. (Perhaps—perhaps not. He didn't say what the intended operations were; nor did he say how the air fleets Hitler took away were constructed, trained, or equipped.) He said one thing that showed to what extent the German Air Force had had to go down to the bottom of the barrel for replacements during the Battle of Britain: The JU-88 was primarily a commercial airplane which had to be adapted for use in the Battle of Britain, along with the He-111 "because we had nothing else. I was not in favor of engaging in the Battle of Britain at that time. It was too early. The He-177 (a four-engine bomber) was late in development."

That is a rather astounding statement, because by that time the German Air Force should have been at its peak, ready to lock horns with the R.A.F. under any and all circumstances. It was the thing for which the German Air Force presumably had been preparing for years. Why else did it exist? A few more months would not have helped the Luftwaffe to any great extent because the R.A.F. was beginning to reach its own peak, and the time had come when the two Air Forces must clash to see who

was to have supremacy in the sky. The Battle of Britain was the real test of both the R.A.F. and the German Air Force.

When Goering was asked, "Did our bombing attacks affect your training program?" he gave an answer which we had known to be a fact long before I received Spaatz' letter. Said Goering, "The attacks on oil retarded the training, and our pilots could not get sufficient training before they were put in the air, where they were no match for your flyers."

We had planned it that way.

Another interesting question asked was, "Could Germany have been defeated by Air Power alone, using England as a base, without invasion?" Goering replied, "No, because German industry was going underground, and our counter measures would have kept pace with your bombing. But the point is, if Germany were attacked in her weakened condition, as now, *then the Air alone could do it*. That is, the land invasion meant that so many workers had to be withdrawn from factories, production, and even from the Luftwaffe."

When Goering was asked, "Which had the most effect on the defeat of Germany: Area bombing or precision bombing," his reply was, "The precision bombing, because it was decisive. Destroyed cities could be evacuated, but destroyed industries were difficult to replace."

Every time Goering was asked a question covering policies, he came out with the same answer: that he had been forced to do what he did by political dictates.

He was asked, "Why didn't you attempt to cut us off in North Africa, and send the Luftwaffe, which was then superior in the air, against our shipping and the concentration of our airplanes at Gibraltar?" Goering's reply was, "We had too few long-range airplanes, and then later, when you got to Algiers, the airfields in Italy were inadequate. You have no idea what a bad time we had in Italy. If they had only been our enemies instead of our allies we might have won the war." (That, also, was a remarkable statement, considering the amount of time the Germans spent in Italy, and the materials available which they might have used to improve the airdromes. We certainly had heavier airplanes than the Germans—planes that required longer runways. Yet, thanks to the rapid work of our aviation engineers, we were able to operate our Fifteenth Air Force from Italy with comparatively no trouble.)

"Why did you attack our airdromes on January 1, 1945?" Goering was asked. He replied, "Because every airdrome was loaded with airplanes." Then (to Goering): "Well, why didn't you come back? Why didn't you repeat?" Goering's reply, again typical, was, "Orders from

higher headquarters. Hitler said it was no good to bomb American airplanes because more of them would come like bees."

Goering's interrogator then asked, "How would you contrast the Air Forces of the Allies?" He replied, "Well, the Russians are no good except on undefended targets. You need only three or four Luftwaffe airplanes to drive off a 20-plane Russian attack. The American airplanes are superior technically, and in production. As for personnel, English, Germans, and Americans are equal as fighters in the air."

He was asked, "In your opinion, in the tactical operations of our Air Force, the attacks on what targets were most damaging to you?" "The attacks on marshaling yards were most effective," he said. "Next came the low-level attacks on troops, then the attacks on bridges. The low-flying airplanes had a terror effect which caused great damage to our communications. Also demoralizing were the 'umbrella' fighters, which, after escorting the bombers would swoop down and hit everything, including the jet planes in the process of landing."

The question of whether he failed to build big bombers because he did not believe in strategic air power, or because the productive capacity was restricted to the production of tactical aircraft brought this reply: "I have always believed in strategic use of air power. I built the Luftwaffe as the finest bomber fleet, only to see it wasted on Stalingrad. I was always against the Russian campaign." (Perhaps there was some hindsight in that reply!)

It was a remarkable interview, but it didn't bring out all the information I should like to have obtained from Goering. I should like to have found out why the Luftwaffe carried out strategic air operations in the Polish campaign, and for a while in the Netherlands and the French campaigns, and thereafter appeared to be chained to the Army and did very little except troop support. Did the Germans ever really contemplate having a strategic air force? Did they have a full conception of what a strategic air force really was, and what was necessary to keep it operating? Did they really understand Air Power? Why did they not have a training and production program sufficiently large to take care of their combat losses? We had to do it in the United States to maintain a constant or ever-increasing strength in our battle areas. There were many other questions, the answers to which would have been interesting to me.

I had been very glad, during my trip in the Pacific, to see that the working staff of Francis d'Olier's Strategic Bombing Survey Committee, USSBS, was operating there. His report, made by disinterested men, always should be of extreme value to anyone who studies the future and